

# Study reveals careers 'gender gap' for university graduates

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A study by Oxford University's Careers Service has found a 'gender gap' in the jobs male and female university graduates go on to attain within six months of leaving.

Male and female students also show differences in how they think about their career potential – and this can be seen even in sixth-form pupils.

A study of students at 7 universities including Oxford and Cambridge found that female graduates who go into work are 9 percentage points less likely to be in a graduate-level job than their male counterparts:

90% of male leavers secured graduate-level jobs compared with 81% of female leavers six months after graduation. The gender disparity extended to pay, with the average male leaver earning £25,000 six months after graduating compared with £21,000 for females.

The analysis used data on the destination of leavers compiled by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in 2013, and looked at almost 17,000 students who were surveyed six months after leaving. The study looked at a wide range of possible factors contributing to students' career destinations and salaries, and found gender to be the strongest determining factor. It used Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data taken from Cambridge University, Imperial University, The London School of Economics, UCL, Durham University and the University of Bristol in addition to Oxford.

Additional research into the attitudes of Oxford students about their career goals and prospects pointed to a gender divide in students' career attitudes that may explain some of the differences in job outcomes. Male undergraduates tended to start earlier in their university education in both thinking about and acting on their career goals. Women were more likely to concentrate on their academic and extracurricular activities. And when it came time to start applying for jobs, male undergraduates showed more confidence in their job prospects and were less hesitant about taking the initiative to approach recruiters or potential employers.

Jonathan Black, director of Oxford University's Careers Service, who commissioned the research, says: 'We set out to explore the possible drivers of securing a graduate-level job, and considered gender, ethnicity, social background, degree class, subject, and disability. We were pleased to find that social background appears to have no significant effect on securing a graduate-level job: a finding that we should celebrate. Indeed, of all the factors we explored, gender has the biggest effect, with a statistically significant lower proportion of women

than men achieving a graduate level job within six months.

'Recruiters tell us that they are keen to recruit and retain women, which made us focus our research on students' attitudes and behaviours to see if we could learn what is causing this gap, and what programmes we might create to address the situation. For example, we developed (with sponsorship from RBS) and run a holistic development programme for 150 women each year, based on the award-winning Springboard programme for mid-career women – and are delighted that this programme is now running in several other universities.'

Male and female undergraduates showed largely similar priorities in what they looked for in a job, rating factors such as intellectual challenge, work/life balance and location highly. Women, however, tended to seek out job security and jobs they felt served a worthwhile cause at rates significantly higher than their male counterparts. All students put a low priority on selecting jobs that enabled them to have a family – a finding which appears to show that women are not, in their first role, restricting their choices because of concerns over future family plans.

The research suggests gender-based differences in career destinations may start with attitudes already present in younger male and female [students](#). In addition to the HESA university data, the Careers Service research piloted a survey of sixth-form pupils across a mixture of 42 state and independent schools, examining the career attitudes of around 3,200 pupils. The responses showed some of the gender differences in undergraduate job-seekers were already apparent by sixth form.

Sixth-form girls showed significantly lower levels of confidence than boys when asked about a number of career-related factors (such as their work experience, commercial awareness or confidence in scoring well at online tests). Compared with the boys' rating, girls rate 'lifestyle' factors

higher when considering what is influencing their choice of job; particularly rating 'a cause I feel good about, or serving a greater good' significantly higher.

'Based on the emerging school pupils' data, we are beginning to adapt some of our university student programmes for use in schools', says Black. 'We have run a preliminary workshop with sixth form girls who wanted interventions starting as early as Year 7, to build and practice confidence, leading in later years to short modules focused on career, negotiating, assertiveness and marketing themes. We are planning to create some pilot programmes that would be available to any school. We also hope to extend our research to as many schools as possible.'

The Careers Service is continuing to expand the research to involve more schools, from all sectors, and is beginning to find significant [differences](#) in attitudes between pupils in single-sex and coeducational schools.

Alice Phillips, Chair of the Girls' Schools Association, said: 'It is a real pleasure to see the Oxford University Careers Service taking a lead in this important area, analysing the causes and working with groups such as the Girls' Schools Association to address the findings. This is a marked difference in approach from the careers' guidance that was available to many of us in the past at our universities. Women represent half the potential work force and need to be helped not only to have the confidence to gain that representation but to maintain it over time, to the tops of their professions.'

Provided by Oxford University

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